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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUSHANBE 000170

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: ISLAMIC PARTY'S KABIRI UNPLUGGED

REF: (A) DUSHANBE 146; (B) DUSHANBE 90; (C) DUSHANBE 02

CLASSIFIED BY: RICHARD HOAGLAND, AMB, EXEC, STATE.  
REASON: 1.5 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: At a small dinner party on January 29, First Deputy Chairman of the Islamic Revival Party Muhiddin Kabiri freely discussed the upcoming elections and his party's chances of success. Drawing on his experiences in the last parliamentary elections, he opined that President Rahmonov would ensure that his party retains power by any means possible. Kabiri said that Rahmonov retains popularity, but the next generation of voters will look for concrete economic achievements before casting their votes for him. Kabiri, like his party, looks to the 2010 parliamentary elections as the target date for possible change. End summary.

¶2. (C) DCM participated on January 29 in a small dinner hosted by a German Embassy colleague whose featured guest was Muhiddin Kabiri, the first deputy chairman of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Arriving in his newly acquired Mercedes Benz 500 series sedan, and more nattily attired than the rest of the guests, Kabiri declined offers of wine and champagne and settled for downing three or four beers during his stay of five and one-half hours. Over a tasty Persian meal of fessenjun, coo-coo, and mastakhiar, Kabiri discussed the upcoming elections, the role of the IRPT in Tajikistan, and his own political ambitions.

¶3. (C) Kabiri said that the 2005 parliamentary election would not result in any change of power. Referring to his own parliamentary campaign in Faizobod during the last election in 2000, Kabiri said that after the first round of voting he was the front-runner with 48% of the vote. Though he had the support of all the other opposition candidates for the second round, his votes totaled only 48.5%, and the candidate from the President's party, the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT), won.

¶4. (C) Kabiri said that after the first round results were in,

some government officials approached him and suggested that he take the post of ambassador to Iran or to Turkey rather than continue a fruitless campaign to enter parliament. He was specifically told that he had no chance to win the election. Kabiri demurred, though he knew the government would not allow him to win a seat in parliament. A good friend who was leader of one of the small municipalities told Kabiri that President Rahmonov had called him in and ordered him to make sure that Kabiri did not win. Kabiri's friend told him that "I had no choice but to do the President's bidding, but because of our friendship I want you to know what happened."

15. (C) In discussing the upcoming elections, Kabiri said that the IRPT had a long-term outlook. (See Ref A) Realistically speaking, Kabiri said, the IRPT would not win even if the next election were fair and transparent. (He hastened to add, however, that this would not/not be the case.) The IRPT is looking to the next parliamentary election -- in 2010 -- as the one when a viable alternative to Rahmonov could emerge. This would be the first election in which the post-civil war generation would participate, and their desire for increased economic opportunities would not be flavored by the desire for stability that overrides any democratic tendencies in most of the present electorate. Nonetheless, the President is flexing his muscles and chipping away at the IRPT with the recent arrest of Shamsiddinov (Ref B).

16. (C) President Rahmonov, according to Kabiri, already has started his campaign for parliamentary elections. By intimidating independent media, Rahmonov wants to ensure that not much light is shined on his election tactics. (Ref C) And, Kabiri averred, Rahmonov plans to subvert the international community's urging to reform the current election law by "taking over" the process. Once he -- via the PDPT's control of parliament -- brings a draft election law before parliament, any reforms will only be to increase the President's hold on power.

17. (C) Kabiri readily admits that Rahmonov himself is popular with the electorate. In a private and confidential poll conducted by the IRPT, Rahmonov was the favorite for almost half of those polled. The second leading candidate -- who Kabiri would not name -- had support from 11% of those polled, and Nuri, the leader of the IRPT, garnered 8%.

18. (C) Regarding the future of the IRPT, Kabiri said that it is considering changing its name, perhaps removing "Islam" from it. Nuri decided that it might be time to do so and discussed this with the President. Rahmonov told him that it would not be a good idea at the present time, and Kabiri characterized Rahmonov's reasoning as Machiavellian -- the President likes to hold up the IRPT to foreign visitors as the only legal Islamic party in Central Asia and wants to raise the specter of an Islamic "Taliban style" party to the electorate. Kabiri also said that Nuri was ready to leave the leadership of the party and turn it over to him, but Kabiri said he was not yet ready to assume this position.

19. (C) In fact, Kabiri said he was prepared to support a candidate for president from any of the opposition parties, if only there were a viable candidate. The only person who Kabiri believes could measure up is Rahmatullo Zoirov, leader of the Social Democrat Party of Tajikistan. But as Kabiri said he told Zoirov, "if only you were Tajik, you could be president." (Zoirov is an ethnic Uzbek.)

110. (C) Bio note: Kabiri was open and frank in his assessments and commented how much he enjoyed the discussion. Unlike most Tajik politicians, he relishes hard questions, and he answered them thoughtfully. He spoke in Tajiki and English, and although he clearly preferred Tajiki, his English language skills were more than adequate. He obtained his new Mercedes only two weeks ago. He owns a company that imports Russian cars and cranes, selling many of them in Afghanistan. One Afghan customer could not pay for the delivery of a crane and gave Kabiri the Mercedes instead. It's likely that Kabiri will sell the car soon rather than risk trying to service it in Dushanbe -- the closest Mercedes Benz dealer is thousands of miles away.

¶11. (U) Kabul minimize considered.

HOAGLAND